

Riding A Four-footed Taxi

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How did people drive around before the invention of cars? On horses, of course. Horses are known to be reliable, powerful and subservient, making them easy to train them to carry people or cargo, as well as to pull loads for humans. But if you think that horses represent the only transportation alternative to internal-combustion engines, you are mistaken. Read about plenty of other kinds of animals that have provided people with a mode of transportation over the centuries. Not only have humans enjoyed riding on them, so have animals. Learn about animals that employ other living beings to transport them from one location to another.

The physical world can be divided into four categories: inanimate, plant, animal and human. Adam HaRishon was told by Hashem: "Fill the Earth and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over all the animals that walk on the Earth" (*Bereishis* 1:28). Humans were given the ability and the mandate to harness and control the world.

From the beginning effort was made to achieve this goal. Adam's son Hevel became a shepherd, ruling over the animal world, while his other son Kayin tilled the ground and ruled over the plant world. The Sforno comments that Hevel's work to harness animals requires more wisdom than working and ruling over the plant world.

A horse is perhaps the archetype of humans controlling the animal world. We tame it, put a saddle on it and harness its



A camel ride in Eretz Yisrael.



A carriage driven by a hippopotamus. While its speed may be challenged, horsepower should not be an issue.

great power for our use. But not only horses, of course. Avraham Avinu saddled his donkey as he set out to perform the Akeidah. Eliezer led a herd of camels bearing gifts as he set out to find a wife for Yitzchak.

Horses, donkeys and camels are not the only animals employed by humans. The *Midrash* and *Zohar* record that Shlomo Hamelech had an eagle that would appear before him each morning. Shlomo would mount the eagle, and it flew him to wherever he wished. *Midrashim* like this have to be understood properly, but the beginnings of aviation history can perhaps be traced to that eagle. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Avodah Zara* 3:2 as understood by *Pnei Moshe*), Alexander the Great of Macedonia mimicked this feat when he rode on an eagle to visit remote locales.

These are just a few of the more famous examples of how humans have harnessed the power of the animal world. You would be surprised how many other examples there are....

Grab a Ride on an Ostrich

The ostrich, the largest living species of bird, cannot fly but can sprint at speeds up to 40 MPH. They are very powerful and been known to kill their greatest predator, the lion.

If an ostrich is strong enough to dispatch a lion, it should be able to handle the weight of a human being on its back. And, in fact, it can carry even very heavy people, which ought to make it a good candidate for riding. The problem is that domesticating ostriches has proved very difficult.

A person who trains ostriches to give people rides must be extremely careful. They run fast and wild, throwing themselves from side to side as they waddle at high speeds, making it extremely difficult for a rider to stay on. What makes the job easier is that ostriches are not particularly clever.

(According to popular legend, an ostrich in danger will bury its head in the sand, hiding the attacker from its view.... Although this has been proven to be a misconception, it's not far off the mark.)



A wagon driver with his trained ostrich.



You have to hold on tight because an ostrich runs fast and wild.

Ostrich farmers take advantage of a simple trick to tame the wild and burly bird. They tie a dark sock or cloth over its eyes. When the ostrich cannot see anything, it calms down. This makes it easy for a person to mount its back. The bird will remain compliant as long as the sock remains over its head.

When the farmer removes the cloth, the ostrich will take off like a rocket, its rider holding on for dear life. Admittedly, ostrich riding is adventurous, to say the least. People get hurt. So before you try it, be forewarned.



Farmers cover the ostrich's head with a dark cloth so it cannot see. It will remain calm and allow a person to mount it, but the moment the cloth is removed, it will take off at a gallop.

Elephants for Transportation

The ostrich is far from the only exotic animal to have been tamed for humans to ride upon. The elephant has long proved popular in Asia. They have been used there mainly for transport.

Perhaps the most famous usage of elephants was in the war waged by Hannibal of Carthage. Taking with him a battalion of elephants on a trek across the nearly impassable Alps, he entered Italy unopposed through its northern frontier, which was undefended because no one thought it possible for a dangerous army to violate Roman territory that way. Continuing south with his army and its specially trained attack elephants, he easily defeated and conquered the mighty Roman army. (Unfortunately for Hannibal, although his surprise attack from the north succeeded, it was only part of a series of wars between Carthage and Rome, which ultimately resulted in a complete Roman victory and



According to scientists, ostriches don't really bury their heads in the sand.... or do they?

the utter destruction of Carthage.)

Similarly, the story of Chanukah features the use of elephants in warfare by the Seleucid kings fighting the Maccabees.

